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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001254

SIPDIS

STATE FOR INL/GTIP AND SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/01/2019

TAGS: [KTIP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: STATE PROSECUTORS MAINTAIN THAT
"HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS NOT A PROBLEM HERE"

REF: ASHGABAT 215

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Sylvia Curran. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Poloff met on September 28 with four representatives of Turkmenistan's Prosecutor General's office -- three senior prosecutors and the head of the International Relations section -- to discuss the upcoming visit of a G/TIP Program Analyst. She also provided copies of the Embassy's non-paper on combating trafficking in persons in Turkmenistan, which we had conveyed to the MFA two weeks earlier. The non-paper contains recommendations for the Turkmen government to consider implementing during the coming months, including creation of a national anti-trafficking strategy, initiation of a public awareness campaign, training for law enforcement officials, establishment of a shelter for trafficking victims, and the investigation/prosecution of human trafficking cases. The prosecutors echoed much the same message conveyed to Poloff in January (reftel), when they pointed out that human trafficking so far does not exist in Turkmenistan.

IT COULDN'T HAPPEN HERE

¶2. (C) Our interlocutors studied the non-paper carefully, and noted that they found the proposals interesting and useful, but commented that, other than the reference to the prosecution of trafficking cases, they were not within the purview of the Prosecutor General's functions. On that point, the head of the International Relations section said that no cases had been prosecuted to date because trafficking crimes have yet to be "criminalized" (i.e. added to the criminal code) in Turkmenistan. More than one of the prosecutors went on to underscore that human trafficking is "highly unlikely" in Turkmenistan, given the "close-knit" families and presence of "law enforcement" personnel throughout the country, both of which would, in their view, thwart any attempts to recruit victims from Turkmenistan for trafficking schemes of any kind. As prosecutor Batyr Kulhanov expressed it, "Everyone knows everyone else in Turkmenistan. Trafficking is just not a problem here."

SHELTER? BUT THERE ARE NO VICTIMS

13. (C) The one female prosecutor in the group pointed at the recommendation concerning establishment of a shelter for trafficking victims and asked puzzledly, "A shelter? Why would we need that? There are no victims here." Another conceded that some type of residential facility might be a good idea, in the event that it is ever needed in the future, but said that its focus should be on "rehabilitation." On the subject of a possible public information campaign, the international relations head said "We have already had such a campaign. The Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons was published in the newspaper as soon as it was enacted in 2007. Everyone is aware of its existence."

14. (C) COMMENT: At this most recent meeting with the Prosecutor's Office, the atmosphere was relaxed, and the Turkmen interlocutors listened politely to our points. Senior Prosecutor Kulhanov even pulled Poloff aside afterwards to express his interest in joining the English language courses funded by INL for law enforcement personnel, and asked whether he might participate in a U.S. exchange program to learn more about anti-trafficking operations in the U.S.

15. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: It comes as no surprise that the Prosecutor's office continues to insist that human trafficking does not exist in Turkmenistan. This seems to be part of their standard talking points for any discussions with foreign diplomats, including one with a senior OSCE trafficking specialist who visited Ashgabat in August. In talks with both UNODC and IOM, however, the same prosecutors have alluded to cases of trafficking that are currently being investigated, where at least one perpetrator has been charged. END COMMENT.

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